

No Cold and Flu for Me and You



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Seems like everywhere you turn, someone is sneezing, sniffing or blowing their nose this time of year. As soon as someone coughs, we hear these familiar words: "I hear there's a bug going around." Welcome to the cold and flu season.

Cold and Flu

A cold is slang for a viral upper respiratory infection which causes inflammation of the mucous membranes of the nasal cavity. This inflammation of the nasal cavity leads to a runny nose, watery eyes and a general "stuffed-up" feeling. More than 200 different viruses are known to cause the symptoms of the common cold. Rhinoviruses and coronaviruses are often the culprits when it comes to common colds in adults. The flu, derived from "influenza," is a viral respiratory infection caused by a number of viruses, including the influenza virus. The flu is characterized by fever, malaise, weakness and muscle aches. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that 10% to 20% of Americans come down with the flu during each flu season. Although most people recover, it is estimated that over 100,000 people are hospitalized and around 36,000 people die as a result of the flu every year.

Although similar, the flu is quite different than the common cold. For one, symptoms of the flu are far more severe than the common cold. A cold fever is generally milder in comparison to a flu fever. Another difference is that cold sufferers rarely get the intense exhaustion associated with the flu.

Cold and Flu Relief

Now that we know what to expect from the cold and flu, let's focus on what can be done to prevent and treat these diseases.

Vitamin C has been shown to decrease the number of sick days during the common cold. Some studies have shown that vitamin C supplementation and high dietary vitamin C intake helps prevent the common cold.

Garlic has a long history of use in preventing the common cold. A study was conducted on 146 volunteers where one group of volunteers received a daily garlic supplement and the other received a placebo. The frequency and intensity of cold symptoms were monitored from November to February. At the end of the study, volunteers receiving garlic daily had significantly less colds. The placebo group experienced more colds and had longer duration of cold symptoms. The researchers concluded that taking garlic makes you less likely to get the common cold.

Astragalus and Echinacea have also been shown to be effective against the cold and flu. One study of 95 participants showed that taking Echinacea at early onset of cold or flu symptoms was effective for relieving these symptoms. Astragalus has been shown to stimulate the immune system and according to traditional Chinese medicine, astragalus helps the body overcome disease (adaptogenic properties).